C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 004294

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TAGS: JO KDEM PGOV
SUBJECT: JORDAN: PARTIAL SOLUTION EMERGING FOR ELECTION
MONITORING

REF: AMMAN 4277

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador David Hale
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 19, Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit
issued a long-awaited statement on the ability of civil
society organizations to monitor the upcoming November 20
election. While Bakhit effectively annulled earlier vague
Interior Ministry prohibitions, by announcing that some form
of "follow-up" would be allowed, he restricted this
permission to the National Center for Human Rights, a NGO
that is generally (but not always) favorable to the
government. Civil society contacts by and large see the
decision as better than nothing, but still far from where
they would like to be. They are considering their reaction
while preparing scaled-down monitoring efforts. Some
candidates see the King's hand in the decision to allow some
monitoring against the wishes of others in the GOJ.
(Comment: In that sense this partial solution is
significant. End Comment.) As elections approach, the
practical application of the PM's statements needs to be
worked out. End Summary.

Monitoring Allowed - Within Limits

¶2. (U) On October 19, Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit appeared
on television to discuss the issue of election monitoring by
domestic NGOs in the upcoming November 20 parliamentary
polls. While praising the positive role to be played by
civil society organizations, Bakhit stressed that in order
for monitoring to take place in an "orderly and serious"
manner, limitations would be necessary. He indicated that
the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) would be the only
accredited body allowed to monitor polls, and suggested that
other civil society organizations act "through NCHR as an
umbrella".

¶3. (U) Bakhit continued: "Approximately two weeks ago,
agreement was reached with the Center to have it assume its
role and choose around 100 to 150 representatives from the
civil society organizations that wish to participate on
condition that they receive training on the mechanisms and
bases of the monitoring and follow-up operations...We in turn
will follow up the issue with the Center step by step to
organize the activities of these representatives and secure
their visits to electoral centers and facilitate the measures
and procedures to them."

¶4. (U) Responding to a question about the difference between
"monitoring" the elections and "following up" on the
elections, Bakhit declared that the government "does not need
to obtain a certificate of good behavior from anybody," and
set a red line around questioning the government's ability to
effectively implement its own procedures. Referring to
constitutional provisions allowing candidates or their
representatives to monitor balloting, he said, "we do not

accept supervision that is not from within the boundaries
that are set by the law...Simply speaking, this means casting
doubts on the elections process in advance, and this does not
befit the Jordanian elections experience."

IAF Reaction

¶5. (U) The Muslim Brotherhood's party, the Islamic Action
Front (IAF), released a press statement shortly after
Bakhit's interview denouncing the move to limit civil society
participation. Calling the message "neither positive nor
reassuring", IAF spokesman Ruhayl Ghurabiyah insisted that
the government is "required to allow monitoring of the
elections in order to prove the sincerity of its intentions
in carrying out fair elections."

Civil Society Reaction

¶6. (C) While many civil society organizations see progress in
Bakhit's statements, the general reaction is mixed. On the
positive side, the previous statements of the Interior
Minister, which had categorically ruled out the possibility
of civil society monitoring, were effectively annulled. The
PM's statements also open the door for civil society
organizations to train and equip NCHR in its monitoring
effort - something that the National Democratic Institute
(NDI) is preparing to do. Some see the fact that only the
NCHR will be accredited as an indication of the desire of the
government to control the process through a more established
group, and are concerned about the lack of a blanket
affirmation of civil society's right to monitor.

¶7. (C) Hani Hourani, Chairman of the Jordanian NGO "Al Urdun
Al Jadid" ("New Jordan"), and head of a coalition of civic
groups that is organizing a monitoring effort, indicated that
he was willing to work with the NCHR but would still press
the issue of wider participation. He is concerned that the
NCHR's efforts may amount to nothing more than a "touristic
visit" to polling stations on election day rather than an
organized campaign. He also expressed concern with the
numbers of monitors mentioned by Bakhit in his remarks,
saying that "100 to 150" would not be adequate enough to
cover the entire country. Note: There will be 4000 polling
stations in the election. USAID-funded training on election
monitoring was given to over 2000 likely candidates. Between
the representatives of these candidates (who are allowed
within the polling sites), the official election monitors,
and "sidewalk monitors" (non-approved monitors who will seek
to observe the elections from outside polling stations),
there will likely be significant coverage in any event. End
Note.

¶8. (C) NGO contacts expect that NCHR will release a statement
in the near future. They indicate that the general tone
towards Bakhit's remarks will be positive, as it marks some
progress from where they were one month ago. Still, they
anticipate that the statement will call for a broader
inclusion of civil society organizations in the monitoring
process. Contacts indicated that the statement will likely
be released after the conclusion of the candidate
registration period on October 24, so as to not acquire a
tinge of partisanship. Contacts also point out that Bakhit's
verbal remarks on television are a general statement of
principle, not guidelines. In the absence of any clear
government edict, some civil society organizations are moving
forward with their plans for "sidewalk monitoring", with the
hope that they will be allowed eventually into the polling
stations themselves.

¶9. (C) In a training session put on for candidates by the
National Democratic Institute, participants claimed they saw
evidence of positive royal intervention in the government's

about face. Note: Unlike previous statements by the
Interior Minister, PM Bakhit's interview was laced with
references to the King. In one typical moment, he noted that
"holding fair and accurate elections" was part of a "model
that will satisfy His Majesty the King." End Note. The
candidates surmised that Bakhit's announcement was "a win for
the King" in the face of the government's desire to pursue a
more conservative, control-oriented stance. Several posited
that they would use the monitoring debate as an issue in
their campaigns, claiming that the government's opacity on
monitoring is proof that corruption is widespread.

Semantics As Politics

¶10. (C) The fight over election monitoring has included a
dispute over semantics. The government prefers "rasd", which
can mean simple "observation" or "surveillance", or
"mutaba'a", which is closest to "follow-up" or "pursuit".
The NCHR used "rasd" to describe its monitoring efforts
during the July municipal elections, in which the
organization was not allowed inside polling stations. PM
Bakhit has used both "rasd" and "mutaba'a" in his statements
to imply that civil society does not need to physically
observe the procedure in order to "monitor" the situation.
Many civil society organizations prefer the term "muraqaba",
which also means observation, but with the implication of
supervision or control. This term was disputed by PM Bakhit
in his television appearance, in which he said that the
elections were not "the result of international pressure so
that one might say that elections are supervised."

Diplomatic "Follow-Up"

¶11. (SBU) Bakhit also touched on the role of embassies in
monitoring the elections during his televised remarks. Using
the term "mutaba'a" ("follow-up"), the Prime Minister said
that he "welcome(d) all the representatives of the embassies
accredited to Jordan...to monitor this manifestation and
highlight the democratic, civilized, and respectable image of
the Jordanian state." He then invited embassies to
coordinate with the Interior Ministry on how that monitoring
would work in practice. Post will be following up with the
Interior Ministry in the coming days to clarify the role that
embassies will be allowed to play in election monitoring.
The Embassy is planning to deploy seven teams on election day
that will visit diverse polling stations throughout the
country.

¶12. (SBU) Through supplemental USAID subgrants to NDI, Post
is also planning to cover some of the costs of training and

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deploying monitors. Based on future clarification on the
issue of "follow-up" versus "monitoring", these funds will be
used by partner organizations towards either monitoring
inside the polling stations or "sidewalk monitoring".

Unresolved Issues

¶13. (C) Questions remain about how the monitoring effort will
work in practice. PM Bakhit suggested that civil society
organizations work with or through NCHR, but he was unclear
about how that would happen and in what time frame. For its
part, the NCHR has not yet made any statements about how it
would incorporate the efforts of other organizations into its
own campaign. Note: The director of the NCHR was out of the
country when Bakhit made his statement, but returns to Jordan
at the end of this week. End Note.

¶14. (C) Also at issue is how the monitors (either from NCHR,
other organizations, or the candidates themselves) will be
accredited. According to a USAID contractor working with the
Interior Ministry, in the municipal elections General

Intelligence Directorate (GID) representatives were present
at every polling station to check up on the bona fides of
monitors. Neither the Interior Ministry nor the Elections
Committee has put forward a suggestion on how they will
coordinate with NCHR to accredit official monitors.

Comment

¶15. (C) Comment: The statement by the PM opens the door to
at least some monitoring - even if the term "follow-up" is
being used as a fig leaf - and comes after several opaque and
at times contradictory government statements on the role of
civil society in the monitoring effort. Bakhit revealed the
government's "true" stance on monitoring eight days after
Interior Minister Eid al Fayiz announced that election
monitoring by any party other than the candidates themselves
or their representatives would be "unconstitutional"
(reftel). Post's quiet, high-level advocacy with key
advisors to the King on the monitoring issue may also be
related to the timing of PM Bakhit's partial door-opening.
Regardless of the process to date, the time remaining for
Jordan's civil society to effectively prepare to monitor the
elections is short. However, Post will use its resources,
programs, and influence to ensure that the most is made of
this opening, and that the monitoring process is real and
credible. End Comment.
Hale